

## **Luke 15:28-32 The Lost Child Is Found! Lent 4 March 6, 2016**

By Pastor Kenneth Mellon, Trinity Lutheran Church and School, Pleasant Valley Rd., West Bend, WI

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from Jesus Christ who has found us! Amen.

Today, we hear Jesus' parable of a lost child and a loving father who received him back in Luke 15:28-32. These are Your Words heavenly Father. Help us to love others as You have loved us. Your Word is truth.

Dear Christians,

Jesus spoke a lesson today that everyone can understand. We've all experienced being lost or at least know of someone who has been lost. From a child walking down the wrong aisle at the store disappearing from mom or dad, to a soldier lost in enemy territory, the feeling is the same: loneliness, separation, and a desire to be reunited. Too often we hear on the news of a lost child and frantic searches to find him. But, whenever a lost child is found alive, there is happiness for the child, parents, and the searchers. In times when most of our news is sad, it's good to hear a happier story. Jesus wants each of us to be included in his happy story in being helped or helping others. Be glad when we hear

### **The lost child is found!**

**First, who was the lost child?** Jesus told the parable to the religious Pharisees about people that they considered a lower class. Those were the people who committed adultery, were thieves, or had done some other crime. They also excluded people who were poor, diseased, or blind thinking that God had cursed them. No good Jew would talk with them, eat with them, or worship with them. Yet, Jesus even ate with these outcasts prompting the Pharisees to complain. We could understand if they were concerned that Jesus might fall into sin by being with them. But His spiritual safety was the least their concerns.

Jesus kept reaching out to all people, the good Pharisees and the "sinners." As God, He loves all people without exclusion! When you see an ad in the paper for a sale, you see the fine print at the bottom telling you about all the exclusions. Jesus made no exclusions. He wanted all to trust in Him to save them from sin, death, and eternal judgment. "*He came to seek and to save the lost.*" (Luke 19:10) But, which son was truly lost?

The younger son took his inheritance and left with no plans to return to his father's house. When most children leave their parents' home, they leave things behind, but not this younger son. He took everything and went off to live a selfish rebellious life. But, as he sought pleasure, he found pain. He wanted freedom, but became trapped by his sins. What a wasted life! We can be pulled away from God and His Word by the power of sin. Temptations can change us so we value wrong as good. In the case of the younger son, God allowed a famine and starvation to bring him back to the truth. At times, God will let us go through trials to keep us grounded in His Word. The younger son realized that he was apart from the greatest source of happiness, his father.

On the other hand, the older brother was just as lost. He never physically left the farm, but by his lack of love and forgiveness, we see his heart was far from his father. When the father welcomed home the younger son, forgave him and showed him compassion, the older brother was angry and resentful. He thought that his good-for-nothing brother had no place in the family! He showed no compassion. He was filled with pride about his own accomplishments and so he never sought mercy from his father. Listen to the son's words again: "*Look! All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends.*" (v.29) All he could talk about was himself. He didn't acknowledge that everything he had came from his father's goodness to him. Without receiving mercy, he didn't understand how to show mercy to his brother.

Spiritually, we can compare him to people who think that they are godly. They may even go to church and pray. But, they are missing the key ingredient of being found: receiving the mercy, love, and forgiveness of God in Christ. God can read our hearts, too. He sees when our thinking is self-righteous.

May it never be said of us, *“These people honor God with their lips but their hearts are far from Him.”* (Matthew 15:8) We too need to take to heart the warning of Jesus or we will be left outside God’s celebration of saving grace in Christ. Without Christ, it doesn’t matter how religious we are, we will be lost. But, our heavenly Father longs for us to return to Him just like He did for both sons in the parable.

**Second, what are the “signs” of being found?** The first sign is joy. When there is an amber alert and people search for a lost child, people cheer when a child is found alive and well. When we realize that in God’s eyes we were lost children due to our sins, that we deserve God’s just anger, that He hates the evil we do, but then God shows us love and compassion instead of judgment, we are filled with joy. God hasn’t given up on us. The Holy Spirit has given us new life through the good news of Christ and we rejoice!

What is that good news? Jesus was punished as if He was the prodigal son. He was banished from His heavenly Father while on the cross. He was judged, condemned, and punished as the worst of sinners. He wasn’t self-righteous, He was truly righteous. Yet, He suffered the penalty for all sins by His death. God did this to His own Son so we can have a place of honor at the heavenly banquet table with Him. The celebration will be held for us and it will be beyond any welcome we’ve ever had! So we value God’s love in Jesus’ work and trusting in His promise open heaven to us, we rejoice in Christ!

A second sign of being found is amazement in our God. We daily confess to God like the younger son, *“Father, I don’t deserve to be called your child.”* Yet, in His great love God has restored us as His children through Jesus. We want these words to apply to us: *“This brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.”* (v.32) His words remind me of the hymn *Amazing Grace* written by John Newton. As a boy his mother taught him about God, but she died when he was young. He went to sea a bitter and rebellious person and eventually became a slave trader ruining the lives of 1,000’s of people. But, God used his early learning to call him back so that he repented, became a minister, and wrote the famous hymn. God changed the younger son so that he was sorry for his sins and wanted forgiveness. God tells us of His grace that abounds beyond the worst of sins. Through Jesus’ sacrifice, we have been brought back to God. Jesus has restored our loving relationship with Him! We believe in Him and are amazed at His saving grace.

There will be days when we feel unforgiving like the older brother. Jesus said, *“[He] became angry and refused to go in.”* (v.28) We can’t change our sinful attitudes. But, like in the parable when the older brother’s father went out to him, so God reminds us that all the good we have comes from His loving care. We need to see how we don’t deserve His blessing, but He has found and restored us. Christ has forgiven us so we can forgive those who sin against us, just like we say in the Lord’s Prayer.

We can fall into the dangers of becoming like either brother. Either we let sin control us, like anger and jealousy ruled the older brother or like the younger one we neglect the Word which teaches God’s love. We should never think of God’s love in Christ like an old meaningless award on the wall: to show it off when needed, but not to let it affect us. We are dearly loved by God, and that thought should keep us serving Him and others in love. We don’t show love to be saved. We love because Christ has saved us. Our forgiveness and love are fruits of faith and not the source of salvation. We need Christ’s forgiveness always.

The Christians in Ephesus had come from two very different backgrounds: religious Jews and Greek unbelievers. Without Christ they never would have met and worshiped together. But, Paul wrote that Christ had torn down the dividing wall that separated them so they could live as one people serving God for His good purpose. Our barriers will be smaller as long as Christ and His Word are greater in our lives. So, stay focused on the God’s Word! Paul also described Christians as one body, working together to help each other to become stronger. As the children of God, we are one family united in Christ.

When we hear on the news that a lost child is found, we should be happy. We should be happier that as lost spiritual children we have been found by Christ. As believers, we prize our loving relationship with our heavenly Father and we want to share His love with all people. When we need motivation to love, remember the story of the two lost sons, and how we all need Christ to keep us in God’s family. Amen.